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THE GREAT TORCH RACE

An Address Delivered at the Dedication of
The Wrenn Library

By

REGINALD HARVEY GRIFFITH, Ph.D.

Professor of English and Curator of the Wrenn Library

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS
AUSTIN

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A FOREWORD

In the Christmas holidays of 1917, Professor Griffith visited Chicago for the especial object of examining certain rare books by Alexander Pope in the library of the late Mr. John H. Wrenn. He learned that the books, a portion of Mr. Wrenn's estate, were to be sold, and that if, by the terms of the sale, the books could be held in tact in a university library, the heirs of Mr. Wrenn would contribute a noteworthy portion of the estimated price.

Returning to Austin, Professor Griffith placed the matter before President Vinson, and enthusiastically urged that the University of Texas acquire the collection. The President next morning laid the matter in his turn with enthusiasm and dispatch before the attention of Major George W. Littlefield, a member of the Board of Regents. The Major's reply was: "If the library is as desirable as you say, we will have to find the money." An investigation of the worth of the library, supervised by Mr. W. H. Burgess, a former Regent then resident in Chicago, was entirely satisfactory; and Major Littlefield gave his personal check to President Vinson to conclude the sale with.

The books, approximately 6,000 in number, were boxed under the care of Mr. Harold B. Wrenn, son of the collector, who came to Austin and himself placed them on the shelves in a room specially and beautifully fitted for their home.

The Wrenn room was opened for public use in June, 1919; but the books were not formally dedicated to the service of the University until March 26, 1920. The dedication ceremony was held on the campus, in the shade of the Education Building, which flanks the Library Building. The Librarian, Mr. Goodwin, presented to the audience President Vinson, who told the story of how the Wrenn Library came to Texas and of what it will mean to the University. Mr. Wroe, representing Major Littlefield, who was ill at the time, spoke of the donor's happi-

ness in adding this to his other benefactions to the University; and Major Richard F. Burgess, representing his brother, who was unable to be present, spoke of Mr. Burgess's belief in the greatness of the Library and his pleasure in being associated with its coming to the University of Texas. The dedicatory address was delivered by Professor Griffith, Professor of English and Curator of the Wrenn Library.

More recently the Catalogue of the Wrenn Library has been distributed. It is the gift of Mr. George W. Brackenridge, and is a privately issued set of five volumes of about 300 pages per volume, prepared by Mr. Harold B. Wrenn and Mr. Thomas J. Wise and printed in England upon hand-made Whatman paper. Only 121 sets of the Catalogue have been printed and they are for presentation to the prominent libraries of the world.

THE GREAT TORCH RACE



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THE GREAT TORCH RACE

IF I had ingenuity enough, I should try this afternoon to put together for you an account of the contents of the Wrenn Library. The task is impossible, and any attempt would be unendurably catalogy and dry. In its stead, you are cordially invited to visit the Library, which is open daily from nine to five, when Miss Ratchford or I will gladly outline for you what is there, with the books before your eyes.

Let me ask you now to give your imagination play, and build before your mind's eye a picture, which I shall call The Great Torch Race. Let me sketch in three panels of it—something concerning the founders of libraries, something of the greatness of books, something of the place and opportunity of Texas;—and you, if you please, in your imagination build the rest of the picture.

The ancient Greeks had an athletic contest which they called a torch race. Each contestant carried a torch, and the winner was the first to reach the goal with his torch still alight. A variation of the game was the relay race, in which a companion seized the lighted torch from the spent runner and continued the race. This ancient game has more than once done service as a figure of speech to symbolize the progress of civilization through the world's history. In the great march upward from the night of ignorance, the leaders of men have been thought of as each lighting a torch, carrying it high in life, and at death entrusting it to the hands of a younger companion, to be borne by successive hands forever onward towards the goal. Such leaders have been many—as numberless as are ideas among men. And their torches in the pageant have flamed with colors innumerable.

It is of only a very few such bearers of torches in the great

and lucent race that I ask you to allow me to speak—especially of book-collectors, founders of libraries.

The library at Oxford University boasts two very early friends. But their benefactions, alas! perished in the savagery of subsequent wars. Richard de Bury was the author of the *PHILOBIBLON*, the "Book Lover." His ambition was to assure assistance to the whole University out of his books. He provided the ordinary texts and commentaries for the students, and was extremely anxious that they should be instructed in Greek and the languages of the East. Rules for the use of the books were strict. A raw student, he said, would treat a book as roughly as if it were a pair of shoes, would stick in straws to keep his place, and would very likely eat fruit or cheese over one page and set a cup of ale on the other, or impudently scribble across the text, or try his pen on a blank space; "and all these negligences," he adds, "are wonderfully injurious to books."

Duke Humphrey, third son of King Henry IV and brother to King Henry V, Falstaff's "Prince Hal," is often spoken of as the founder of the library. His whole family cared for books, and were generous to the University, but Humphrey, called the Good Duke Humphrey, was especially so. His gifts were acknowledged to be "an almost unspeakable blessing." When his books arrived, "the general joy knew no bounds"; and the name "Duke Humphrey's Library" was given to the general assemblage of the University's books.

Sir Thomas Bodley did more than either or both of these. He won a great reputation as an ambassador, and Queen Elizabeth would gladly have retained him in political service. But in 1597 he had grown weary of affairs of state. He determined then to give his means and himself for the rest of his life to the service of books. He would make the library at Oxford one of the world's greatest. Here are his own quaint words: "I concluded at the last to set up my staff at the library door in Oxon. I found myself furnished with such four kinds of aids as, unless I had them all, I had no hope of success. For without some kind of knowledge, without some purse-ability to go through with the charge, without good store of friends to further the design, and without special good leisure to follow such a work, it could not

but have proved a vain attempt." He supplied funds and had agents buying books in all parts of Europe. He refitted the chamber for the library, supplying cases and tables and chains—he was extraordinarily careful about the chains, with which the books were chained to the shelves. His enthusiasm was so great that friends were glad to assist him with gifts of precious volumes. From his home county of Devon, Dudley Carleton wrote in a gossipy letter: "Every man bethinks himself how by some good book or other he may be written in the scroll of the benefactors." When King James I visited Bodley at the library, he said: "If I were not a King I would be an University-man, and if it were so that I must be a prisoner I would desire no other durance than to be chained in that library with so many noble authors." Sir Thomas lived and wrought on till 1613. The wonderful library, the Bodleian, exists at Oxford now; and to this time the University offers public thanks for Bodley's generosity yearly upon his calendar-day.

The greatness of the library at Cambridge University dates from the year 1715, when Dr. Richard Bentley, greatest of all English scholars, prevailed upon King George I to donate to Cambridge, at a cost of 6,000 guineas (equivalent to about \$300,000 now), the books of Bishop Moore of the diocese of Ely. Bishop Burnet writes that the library was a treasure beyond what any one would think the life and labor of a man could compass.

One of the most interesting collections at Cambridge is the gift of Samuel Pepys. Of the garrulous Pepys it is hard to say whether he will live longest because he wrote the most delightful diary in the world, or because he was founder of the British navy, the wall first of wood, now of steel, around the liberties of England, or because he collected books. His penchant was for plays, street-ballads, and the ephemeral literature of his day. He willed his books to Magdalene College, Cambridge, and there they are now, in the same cases that stood in Pepys's own home and placed on the shelves in the very order he himself chose, the tall books at the back showing over the tops of the small books in front. He made a catalogue, which he called "titleing" his volumes. One of the pleasant pictures of the DIARY is of how

he himself, and the very young and pretty Mistress Pepys, and Deb Willett, the young serving-maid (also pretty, he naively relates) were busy one evening until midnight "titleing" the books.

Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford, and intimate friend of Pope and Swift and Prior, was a prince among collectors. The Harleian library contained 50,000 books, a huge body of manuscripts, and an incredible number of pamphlets. Dr. Johnson has described the contents. The Earl had the rarest books of all countries, languages, and sciences; thousands of fragments, some a thousand years old; vellum books; a great collection of Bibles, and editions of all the first printed books, classics and those of English writers printed by Caxton, Wynkyn de Worde, Pynson, Berthelet, Rastell, and Grafton; and the greatest number of pamphlets and English portraits of any other person; original letters of eminent persons as many as would fill 200 volumes; all the collections of Humphrey Wanley, Stow, Sir Simonds D'Ewes, Prynne, Bishop Stillingfleet, John Bagford, Le Neve, and the flower of a hundred other libraries. Most of the library was scattered. But the manuscripts were purchased by the nation in 1753; and they, with the scientific collection and the books of Dr. Hans Sloane, bought at the same time, were the beginning of the British Museum.

Book collecting might well seem to be one of the best guarantees of long life, for most collectors have lived to a ripe old age. Better still, it may be said of them as a class what Dr. Johnson said of one of them: He lived more in the broad sun of life than any other man I ever knew. But doubtless the founders who have left libraries to be sources of knowledge and wisdom and joy to after-comers will rejoice most in the ineffable pleasure they bestow. The eminent scholar Heinsius said, when entering the library at the University of Leyden: "In the very bosom of eternity among all these illustrious souls I take my seat."

What are the books to be desired for a library? First, of course, those the world generally agrees upon as its great books. Is there any underlying principle, any quality shared in common by them? Here is a partial answer for consideration.

Humanity thinks most highly of those men who give the best reasons for thinking highly of humanity. The human race wishes to believe in itself—in its own dignity, worth, and importance. The thinker who bears credible testimony to such worth is acclaimed. And those authors are reckoned greatest whose testimony does most to convince us of the superlative importance of man.

Test this answer for a few moments.

The Bible let us put aside, for it is the thinking of a people, not of one man; and by most Christians it is held to be of divine origin, not human. The sum of its whole message, however, is the worth and eternal importance of every individual soul.

Homer writes of the ten-years war that racked Greece and ruined Troy, of the passions and ambitions, the greatness and littleness of man. He tells of the deities who left high Olympus to come down and help in the battle of man. You do not believe in those gods and goddesses. Perhaps Homer himself did not wholly believe in them. Yet they represented to him and to the listeners to his story the highest forces they could conceive in the whole realm of the universe. If, then, these greatest of all forces assisted in the affairs of men, some on the one side, some on the other, how great, how important, how dignified and worthy must Man be!

Dante journeyed through hell and purgatory and heaven, seeing in those vast confines the fates of men. For him they represented all that is at all after the end of this short life. But Eternal Might and Love created these regions for men's souls. How great, then, how worthy the souls of men!

Shakespeare presents his evidence of the majesty, the excellence, and the weakness too of man in a different way. He conceives of the passions of men,—the fears, hates, jealousies, envies, the loyalties, self-sacrifices, loves,—on an enormous scale, tempestuous, mountainous, and puts them in movement within the soul of man. Like a tropical storm they pass through. How immense in its capacity for suffering, for joy, is the soul in which such forces have room to move! And then, wonderful to contemplate! at the end of each great play, when the storm

has blown upon and dissipated the miasmas of a sick and stagnant moral atmosphere, the great dramatist shows the breaking through of a sweetness of light, like a sunset, giving promise of a fairer day to follow, when justice and right shall more nearly rule the world so late disturbed. Do we believe him? Does not his evidence persuade us to a belief in the worth and dignity of the human soul?

Milton tells the story of the Loss of Eden and the consequent sin and sickness and evil besetting us all around. You may not believe in the dire dungeons of darkness made visible that he paints, or in the conclaves of fallen angels, or the other means by which he weaves his ideas into a story. But here is the heart and core of his conception. He thinks of God and his angels as embodying the infinite forces of Good, and Satan and his cohorts as embodying, personifying, the infinite forces of Evil. These infinite forces are in constant conflict. And the reward of victory in the ever-renewed battle is the soul of Adam, the soul of every man, your soul, my soul. But not alone is man's soul the reward, the guerdon of this battle; each individual soul is the battle ground where the contest is fought out. If, then, each soul is both ground of battle between the greatest thinkable forces in the universe, and the prize of victory, how worthy, how dignified, how great that soul must be!

You nor any other person will cavil at the gathering together of the great books. But some may ask, Why add the books of little men, the more commonplace writers? Such persons are not so thorough-goingly drastic as the Caliph Omar, who destroyed the library of Alexandria, reasoning thus: If the books here agree with the Koran, they are useless, and should be destroyed; if they disagree, they are wicked and ought to be destroyed. No,—but still,—Why the lesser authors? whose books have not been reprinted and consequently can be come at only in the great libraries? To understand the world, to know ourselves, we need the lesser as well as the greater ones. By as much as the great man has personality, individuality, genius, by so much does he rise above the general level and fail to represent the average man. The eighteenth century discovered the

common man. Out of the throes of its revolutions democracy was born. And democracy is today the world's great throbbing YES to the ancient question, Am I my brother's keeper? In this brotherhood of man, which lifts all men up, not drags any down, how can one keep his brother or be kept, except he knows the moods, the thoughts, the needs, the weakness, the latent greatness too in the commonalty, in the hearts of common men!

The ideal library should have Terence's words for its motto: Nothing that concerns men is alien to me.

Now a library is not all of a university. Far from it! Yet the library, and the use made of it—the study of the thoughts and habits and deeds of men, of the spirits of nations, of the soul of man—are the surest index to the excellence of the institution.

What of Texas? What have we? How do we compare with others? What is fitting and becoming? What may we expect and try to have?

We are not without our torch-bearers, our own helpful collectors. Written in "the scroll of the benefactors" are names you are familiar with: the picturesque Sir Swante Palm, whose name is on many a book housed here behind us; and Ashbel Smith; Miss Florence Brooke; and Henry P. Hilliard, who has done much for our collection of Southern authors. Major Littlefield has given with both hands, so to speak. His is the "purseability" that is enabling his "good store of friends," Professors Barker and Ramsdell and Mr. Winkler, to gather the Southern historical collection, which is remarkable now and which promises to be marvelous later. That is his left hand. With his other hand he has presented to us the Wrenn Library of English and American literature from 1500 to 1900,—a collection of rare and beautiful and great books which I know several other universities strove hard to secure, but which, thanks to the generosity of Major Littlefield, we have. In the two years since its purchase, its worth in mere dollars has increased, I believe, to more than three times the purchase price. It is a superb donation, one whose value will go on increasing. Three hundred years from now the gift will still be lauded as an "unspeakable benefit." Men are not numerous ever who possess both the

great wealth and the imaginative vision to give so nobly and so well. To us of the present the gift is most grateful. It heartens us. Doubtless we need criticism. Assuredly we have had it. Even the criticism of ignorance and of malice is not without its value. But approbation IS cheering, welcome as sunshine in winter. And he who extends a hand to help, wins our love and admiration.

The state by legislative appropriation has not been ungenerous. Funds supplied by it, expended as judiciously as they have been, would have provided a library to compare favorably with other Southern libraries—in Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, Virginia. But with the additions from individual citizens our library is placed far in advance of any other Southern library.

Let me narrow the basis of comparison. It is not quite fair to do so. It shows us perhaps fairer and brighter than we really are. Take, however, one group of books as an index of the rest, and discount the comparison as you may please—the books printed in England up to the year 1640. This group includes Elizabethan literature. Rich as the Wren Library is in these books, it is nevertheless still richer in the books of later years. On Tuesday of this week I received a letter from the man in the best position to make comparisons. This is the sum of what he says: You fall considerably behind Yale and Harvard, but are a good deal ahead of the universities of Michigan, Minnesota, California, Chicago, Wellesley, Oberlin, and Vassar; in some respects you are the equal of, in some fall behind, Columbia.

The Huntington Library of California, not a college library at all, is in these books far superior to any other library whatever in America.

The East—Harvard and Yale considerably ahead of us. The West—California far ahead of us. Now complete the geographical triangle—the South. Texas leads and represents the South.

The South asks no man's pity. Yet she was maimed, and has been lame in the running. For long she has had to send the flower of her youth from home for the needed higher learning. Of late she begins to come more into her own. Now one of her

sons gives into the hands of Texas as a trustee a treasure for the use and enrichment of all her sons and daughters.

When I sit in the Wrenn Library, I, too, feel as did old Hein-sius: "In the very bosom of Eternity among all these illustrious souls I take my seat." There is magic there and high romance. To hold in your hand the very book that once belonged to Ben Jonson, see his name written by his own pen, in his own ink; or a book that Locke owned; or a manuscript of Izaak Walton, or Charlotte Bronte, or Edgar Allan Poe! There is beauty there. Many a binder has strained his art to clothe beautifully the body of a great thought. And there is adventure there, the greatest of all adventures—the discovering of something new, unknown before to the world. Already scholars have begun to seek us out. And they will come more and more.

Today we dedicate the Wrenn Library—this place of beauty, of romance, of adventure. And we dedicate it to the increase of knowledge, to research, the finest adventure, the discovery of things new among men.

Am I too ambitious when I say that in this matter of books, as in all other matters, I want Texas to be as good as the best?

What is Texas? One hundred years ago Stephen F. Austin founded the colony in a wilderness. Last year the state paid into the national treasury in income and excess-profits taxes—just these two items alone—the sum of 62 millions of dollars. A territory stretching from El Paso to Texarkana, from Colorado to the Gulf, imperial in its vastness. A population of five million souls, where fifty millions yet will be. A soil and a sun pouring wealth lavishly into the lap of its citizenry. A people that is fitted to be and of right ought to be a leader among nations! Can you not see the state as a young giant, lithe and strong, deep-chested, shaking his shoulders and girding himself for his part in the race of the ages! A state and a people to rejoice in, to be proud of!

Hither from all quarters of the commonwealth, from all parts of this Texas of our loyalty and pride, come the sons and daughters of the people. Come hither to the University in their youth

to learn the best answer they may to the question, What is the meaning of this life? Why is it given to us? What shall we do with it, make of it?

They are the chosen spirits. They are the master minds. Not the least among them but shall be a leader in his community in subsequent years. Hither they come, and at the altar of Alma Mater light and trim their torches and prepare to run their part in the Great Race. They come hither to the University as to a city that is set on a hill and cannot be hid; to the University, whose function, whose life is to find more of light, to spread among men the light which shall light the world onward; to the University, which must and shall be both prepared and determined to encourage, to cheer onward, to help forward and upward those who are "enflamed with the study of learning and the admiration of virtue; who are stirred up with high hopes of living to be brave men and worthy patriots, dear to God and famous to all ages."

But a race for the mere running profits nothing. No race without its goal! And this, the Great Torch Race up from the blackness of the night of ignorance—what is its goal? What is it but enlightenment? Enlightenment, which is Truth—that Truth which shall make us free. "The first creature of God, in the work of days, was the light of the sense; the last was the light of reason. First he breathed light upon the face of matter; then he breathed light into the face of man; and still he breatheth and inspirereth light into the face of his chosen."

His "Chosen!" And may we not be his chosen if we so choose?

"Breatheth and inspirereth light."

Light!

If you will take a beam of sunlight and cause it to fall upon a prism, you will have a very beautiful effect. The one ray will become a ribbon cross-banded with—not white light any more, but all the colors of the rainbow. White light, then, contains within itself, or better still is composed of, all these colors, from violet through all shades to red. For these separate colors recombined make white light again—the perfect light.

In the Great Torch Race must be bearers of torches burning with all colors, not the great primary colors alone, but all the infinite gradations between them in the scale, and above and below them. Men are the bearers; the torches themselves are ideas. All the inventions we now have, all the discoveries that have been made, all the ideas we possess, all phases of knowledge, and all improvements upon them were once new, were born in some human brain, and, like torches passed from hand to hand, have been scattered among men. Saturn is fabled to have invented agriculture, and Cadmus the alphabet. Prometheus was bringer of fire. Watts, Stephenson, Fulton, Morse, Bell, have curtailed space. Marconi puts a girdle around the earth more speedily than Puck in the play. Philosophers, musicians, poets, actors, prophets, discoverers, inventors, novelists, men who set law or government or business in a better way, each and all contribute a color or shade or tint to the sum of the whole.

When time shall come to its end, far yonder in the future, when the race shall have been run and the goal reached, and the number of torches shall be fulfilled, then the flames, the colors of all the torches that humanity carries, shall blend; and from them shall leap, shall be born, single and undivided, the white light of truth. In that day, when days shall cease and time shall be no more, then Man, freed from the shadows of darkness, bathed in beams of ineffable light, shall see God, whose dwelling from eternity to eternity is Light. In that Splendor may it not be found that we have lagged in the running, have left to any other hands the torches we might have borne.



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